The Islaamic Ruling Regarding Plagues

Question: There is a disease spreading in Surat, which the government classifies as a plague, which is contagious. Is this true in the light of the Shari'ah? Can diseases be contagious? What is the ruling concerning fleeing from a plague infested area? It is hoped that you would shed further light on this issue.

Answer: During the Period of Ignorance, people believed that people caught diseases (such as leprosy) from others, which are referred to today as contagious diseases. Rasulullaah ρ negated this belief by stating that there is nothing like contagiousness. The Qur'aan attests to the fact that Rasulullaah ρ does not speak of his own accord, but whatever he says is revelation from Allaah[1].

Hadhrat Abu Hurayrah τ reports that Rasulullaah ρ said, "There is nothing like contagiousness, omens by the flight of birds (people believed that if a bird flew to the left, it was a good sign and a bad sign if it flew to the left), the evil effects of owls and the evil of Safar (people believed that couples should not marry during the last days of Safar)."[2]

Hadhrat Abu Hurayrah τ also reported that Rasulullaah ρ once said, "There is nothing like contagiousness, the evil effects of owls and the evil of Safar." A Bedouin then asked, "O Rasulullaah ρ! But why is it that a camel can be as healthy as the deers in the wild, but as soon as it comes into contact with a camel that suffers from a rash, it also contracts the rash?" Rasulullaah ρ remarked, **"Then from where did the first (ill) camel get the disease from?" (They both got it by the will of Allaah)**[3]

The Ahadeeth above make it clear that Islaam does not hold the belief of contagiousness. Everything happens by the will of Allaah. It is therefore not permissible to think that one will be infected by another person's disease or to think that one will die by staying in an area where a plague has broken out. Rasulullaah ρ prohibited this. Hadhrat Usaama bin Zaid τ once told Hadhrat Sa'd bin Abi Waqqaas τ that he heard Rasulullaah ρ say, **"When you hear that a plague has broken out in an area, do not go there but if you happen to be there, do not flee."**[4]

It is therefore a grave sin to flee from an area of disease with the thought that one will be saved from it. This will also discourage those already afflicted and break their morale. We have been forbidden from going to an area of plague because should a person be affected by the command of Allaah, Shaytaan will always put the doubt in the heart that one would never have been affected had one not been there. This will corrupt a person's Imaan. The Hadith has therefore forbidden both fleeing and entering the area for the express reason of safeguarding one's beliefs. A Mu'min's belief should be that just as staying will not bring on the disease, leaving will not save one either.

The following appears in *Durrul Mukhtaar*[5]: "There will be no harm done if one leaves or enters a plague infested area with the conviction that everything happens by the

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[1] Surah Najm, verses 3,4.
[2] Bukhaari Pg.850 and *Mishkaatul Masaabeeh* (Pg.391).
[3] Bukhaari (Vol.1 Pg.859), Muslim (Vol.2 Pg.230) and *Mishkaatul Masaabeeh* (Pg.391).
[4] Bukhaari (Vol.2 Pg.853) and *Mishkaatul Masaabeeh* (Pg.135).
[5] Vol.5 Pg.661.

will of Allaah. It is however detestable (Makrooh) to hold the belief that leaving will save one and that entering will cause one to be affected. The Hadith has prohibited entering and fleeing only for the purpose of safeguarding one's beliefs."

Allaah says in the Qur'aan: ***"Have you seen those people who fled their homes in the thousands out of the fear of death*** *(fearing that they will die in a plague)****. Allaah said to them, "Die!"*** *(so they all died)* ***and then brought them all back to life."***[6]

The above verse refers to some seventy thousand people of the Bani Israa'eel who fled a village where there was an outbreak of a plague, thinking that they will be saved. Allaah punished them by causing them all to die. It was only after their Nabi υ made du'aa to Allaah that He restored them back to life, after which they were convinced that life and death came only from Allaah.[7]

Another reason for prohibiting entry into a plague infested area is that plague is a punishment for the Kuffaar from Allaah. **For this reason, Rasulullaah ρ hurried past the area where the Thamud nation was destroyed and prohibited the Sahabah ψ from entering the city.**
Hadhrat Jaabir τ reports that Rasulullaah ρ said, "One who flees from a plague is like one deserting a battlefield and one who remains there patiently will have the reward of a martyr."[8]

In his commentary of *Mishkaatul Masaabeeh*, Shah Abdul Haqq Muhaddith Dehlawi رحمه الله writes, "This Hadith makes it clear that fleeing from a plague infested area is a major sin just as deserting a battlefield is. It is in fact kufr to believe that if one flees, he will certainly be saved and will definitely die if he remains behind."[9]

He also writes, "The rule is that one must not flee when in a plague infested area and neither go there when one is not there. However, there are some instances when it is permissible to flee, such as a place where an earthquake is pending or when sitting beneath a wall that is on the verge of collapse. However, since no Hadith is mentioned concerning incidents other than plagues, it is necessary to remain patiently in an area where a plague had broken out and it will not be permissible to flee from there. It is wrong to judge these other incidents by the plague because death from the plague is only a speculation while death from the other causes is nearly certain. Nevertheless, it will not be permissible to flee from such an area, while no Hadith mentions that a person will be sinful and guilty of a major sin by fleeing from any of the other areas. We ask Allaah for safety.[10]

The following appears in *Majaalisul Abraar*[11]: "The Ulema differ with regard to the degree of prohibition. Qaadhi Taajud Deen Subki رحمه الله states that our stance is that of the majority who believe that it is Haraam to flee. Some Ulema however state that it is Makrooh Tanzihi although all agree that it is permissible to leave for a reason other than fleeing. This is because Rasulullaah ρ has stated at the end of the Hadith, 'do not leave there with the intention of fleeing.' The prohibition against fleeing is established from the Hadith of Hadhrat Aa'isha رضي الله عنها in which Rasulullaah ρ said, 'One who flees from a plague, is like one deserting a battlefield.' Another narration of Ibn

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[6] Surah Baqarah, verse 243.
[7] *Tafseer Mazhari* (Vol.1 Pg.343), *Tafseer Ahmadi* (Vol.1 Pg.169).
[8] Ahmad, as quoted in *Mishkaatul Masaabeeh* (Pg.139).
[9] *Ashi'atul Lama'aat* (Vol.1 Pg.653).
[10] *Ashi'atul Lama'aat* (Vol.1 Pg.639).
[11] Pgs. 345,346.

Khuzaymah رحمه الله states that Rasulullaah ρ said, 'Fleeing from it is amongst the major sins and Allaah will punish a person from it if He does not forgive it' … Abul Hasan Madaa'ini رحمه الله quotes his father as saying, 'Few people who flee from a plague are saved from it.' Allaama Taajud Deen Subki رحمه الله remarks, 'What he says is based on experience. It is not at all impossible to believe that Allaah could make a person's flight from a place of plague the cause for reducing his lifespan because the Qur'aan cites flight from a battlefield as a cause for this, when Allaah says: 'Say, 'Your fleeing will be of no avail to you when you flee from death or from being killed for then you will benefit from life only but a little longer.' It is mentioned that his father may have deduced this from this verse."

Hadhrat Mujaddid Alf Thaani رحمه الله has mentioned the same thing in his Maktoobaat. Refer to Vol.1 Pg.430 for the details. One must therefore trust in Allaah and remain where one is because fleeing will not help. One must repent from one's sins and make du'aa to Allaah because only He can help one.

In the commentary of the above Hadith in *Mirqaat*[12], it is stated, "Ibnul Malik رحمه الله says, "Fleeing will not repel Allaah's punishment. The only thing that will do this is Taubah and Istighfaar."

If everyone flees the place, who will be there to tend to the ill and bury the dead? Furthermore, this will break the morale of the ill and cause them to develop ill feelings towards those leaving them. The best is therefore to remain behind, trusting in Allaah and hoping for rewards from Him.

Hadhrat Aa'isha رضي الله عنها narrates that when she asked Rasulullaah ρ about plagues, he said, "It used to be a punishment that Allaah would send to people but which he has made a mercy for the Mu'mineen. When a person stays patiently in a place where a plague has struck, knowing that only that which Allaah has decreed will happen, **he will receive the rewards of a martyr."**[13]

Hadhrat Anas τ reports that Rasulullaah ρ said, "A plague is martyrdom for every Muslim."[14]

Rasulullaah ρ also said, "Martyrs are five; the one who dies in a plague, one who dies of a stomach ailment, one who drowns, one who is crushed and one who dies in the path of Allaah."[15]
Another Hadith quotes that Rasulullaah ρ said, "A plague is martyrdom for my Ummah and a mercy to them, while it is punishment for the Kuffaar."[16]

Allaama Shaami رحمه الله states, "The person who remains patiently behind in a town overcome with a plague will gain the rewards of a martyr even if he dies of another cause. **According to a narration of Bukhaari and Ibn Hajar رحمه الله, he will also not be questioned in the grave."**[17]

Imaam Rabbaani رحمه الله states, "In his book *Badhlul Ma'oon,* Sheikhul Islaam Ibn Hajar رحمه الله states about the virtues of a plague that the person who dies in a plague will not be questioned in the grave because he is like one killed in a battle. Similarly, one

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[12] Vol.3 Pg.360.
[13] Bukhaari (Vol.2 Pg.853) and *Mishkaatul Masaabeeh* (Pg.135).
[14] Bukhaari (Vol.2 Pg.853) and *Mishkaatul Masaabeeh* (Pg.135).
[15] Bukhaari and Muslim, as quoted in *Mishkaatul Masaabeeh* (Pg.135).
[16] *Kanzul Ummaal* (Vol.5 Pg.186)
[17] *Raddul Mukhtaar* (Vol.1 Pg.852).

who remains in a plague infested area with the conviction that only that will happen to him what Allaah decrees, such a person will not be punished because he is like a *Muraabit* (one guarding the borders of a Muslim country). Sheikh Suyuti رحمه الله has mentioned this in his book *Sharhus Sudoor*… Those who remain safe after fleeing have only not died because their lifespan had not ended and those who remained behind and died, only died because their lifespan was over. It must therefore be borne in mind that neither will fleeing save one nor will staying kill one."[18]

It is usually people who engage in acts of flagrant immodesty who are afflicted with plague and disease their forefathers have never heard of. This is established by a Hadith of Ibn Maajah (pg.300). A Hadith of Hadhrat Abdullaah bin Abbaas τ in Ibn Maajah and Tabraani states that Rasulullaah ρ said, **"When fornication becomes rife in a nation, death becomes the order of the day."**[19]

A verse of the Qur'aan states, ***"so We sent a punishment*** *(a plague)* ***from the heavens upon the oppressors because of their disobedience."***[20] This verse refers to a plague that struck the Bani Israa'eel because of their disobedience to Allaahs' commands. Tafseer Baydaawi (Vol.1 Pg.50) states that this plague killed twenty four thousand people in a few moments.

Although the above verses of the Qur'aan and Ahadeeth tell us that a plague comes because of people's sins, Allaah makes it a source of mercy for the Mu'mineen and punishment for the Kuffaar, as established by the Hadith of Bukhaari and *Kanzul Ummaal*.

The gist of it all is that we must never have the belief that diseases are contagious. However, it may appear to one that this belief is contradicted by Ahadeeth such as "Run from a leper as you run from a lion" and "Do not take a healthy camel near a sick camel". **The answer to this is that Rasulullaah ρ made these statements only because of his compassion for the Ummah and to safeguard their beliefs from corruption.** While leprosy is itself not contagious, the fear is that when someone contracts it after interacting with a leper, he may just start to believe that diseases are contagious. If this was not the intention of the above two Ahadeeth, then why did Rasulullaah ρ say, "There is nothing like contagiousness" and "Then from where did the first (ill) camel get the disease from?"? The Ahadeeth never contradict each other.

The most important factor to remember is that everything happens by the will of Allaah and nothing can happen without it. Look at this way, the entire family of a leper are not lepers and everyone in a plague infested area are not affected. I have myself been through three plagues but am healthy by the grace of Allaah. My grandmother passed away in a plague in the year 1325 A.H. At that time, my grandfather, my uncle, my two aunts and my parents were living with her in the same house and nursing her, but none of them were affected. Not only did they survive the plague then, but they also passed through two other plagues afterwards and, by the grace of Allaah, they all remained safe and healthy. If diseases were contagious, why were they all not affected? We should therefore correct our beliefs and trust in the decrees of Allaah. And Allaah knows best what is most correct.

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[18] *Maktoobaat Imaam Rabbaani* (Vol.1 Pg.687).
[19] *Majaalisul Abraar* (Pg.346).
[20] Surah Baqarah, verse 59.